

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the
MAYOR and ALDERMEN
OF THE
CITY of CHESTER,
AT

St. Oswald's Church,
ON THE
Twenty Ninth of May, 1717.

By JOHN OLIVER, M. A.
Minister of St. Peter's, and Prebendary
of the Cathedral Church in Chester.

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in Eastgatestreet, 1717.

To the Right Worshipful

Henry Bennet, Esq; Mayor
of the City of *Chester*, *Roger*
Comberbach, Esq; Recorder,
and the rest of the Alder-
men,

THIS Sermon is Hum-
bly Dedicated, by

Your most Obliged,

Humble Servant



John Oliver.

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the
MAYOR and ALDERMEN
OF THE
City of CHESTER, &c.

Psalms 64. Verse 9.

*And all Men that see it shall say, This
hath God done; for they shall perceive
that it is his Work.*

THE Footsteps of Providence in the
Government, even of the Irrational
World, are so plain and visible,
that a Man must either be extremely Neg-
ligent if he does not observe them, or
strangely given to Infidelity if he is not con-
vinc'd by them.

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That settled Order that remains amongst the several Parts of the Universe, that wonderful Dependance upon, and mutual Relation they bear to each other; the Continuance of this Harmony thro' a long Tract of many succeeding Generations; those fixt unerring Laws by which the Creatures are Govern'd, and those regular Ends to which all their Motions are directed: These, with several other Instances of the same Nature, are so far above the Accounts of Philosophy, that we must have Recourse, whether we will or not, to some Superiour, Invisible Power for the Solution of 'em.

Thus the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his Handy-work: One Day telleth another, and one Night certifieth another. Those Things which have no Speech, nor Language of their own, are yet constant Preachers to all Nations and Languages, that there is a God that Governs the World.

But the Affairs of Mankind are yet a more sensible Proof of this Doctrine; that Countenance and Protection that good Men generally find in the Discharge of their Duty; that Success that for the most part attends their honest Endeavours; those happy Deliverances from the Hands of Violence and Oppression they so often meet with: As on the other hand, the Defeats and Disappointments that bad Men fall under in the Prosecution

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secution of their unjust and wicked Designs, that secret Curse that consumes all their Labours, and frequently descends upon their Posterity, are plain Instances of some All-wise and Righteous Being that oversees the Actions of all Living Men, and makes a constant visible Distinction betwixt the Just and Unjust; insomuch that whosoever shall but Impartially consider the ordinary Course of things, will be obliged to say with the Psalmist, *Verily there is a Reward for the Righteous, doubtless there is a God that judgeth the Earth.*

But because the Mind of Man is extremely prone to Unbelief, and some Men are not to be satisfied unless they see Signs and Wonders, some uncommon and extraordinary Effects of a Divine Power in the Government of the World, it has pleas'd God, for the Manifestation of his own Glory, and for the Conviction of such Incredulous Persons, in all Ages, to give such unusual surprising Indications of the Abhorrence he bears to all Notorious Impiety, by blasting the Designs of Wicked Men, and bringing the Authors of'em to condign Punishment, and of his great Love of Vertue and Innocence, by protecting good Men against the Malice, and delivering them from the Power of their Enemies, that whosoever looks upon these things without Prejudice, must say in the Words of the Text, *This hath God done.* The

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The Words naturally lead us to enquire into some of those Proceedings and Dispensations of Heaven, in ordering the Affairs of Mankind, which are above the common Forms and Methods of Providence, which I shall do in some few Particulars, and reduce all to the wonderful Occasion of this Day, the happy Restitution of our Church and Monarchy. And here,

The first and highest Instance of a Divine Power interposing in the Affairs of Mankind, are Miracles, by which we understand such Works, as either for the Matter of 'em, or the manner of Performance, exceed the Power of Natural Causes; such as dividing the Sea, stopping the Sun in its Course, raising the Dead to Life again, curing the most inveterate Diseases, by a Word, a Touch, or the like.

Which Works, whensoever they were wrought, had always some great and excellent Ends to Accomplish; as, the Publication of some important Doctrine to the World, or the deliverance of the Church from some pressing Calamity, it being utterly inconsistent with that Wisdom that has settled the Course of Nature, to break in upon its own Laws upon any less Occasion.

That such things have been done we must own, unless we will contradict the Faith of all History, as well Profane as Sacred, and condemn the Records of former Ages

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as meer Fictions and Romance; the things above-mentioned being not only Attested by the Inspir'd Writers, but also by Infidels and Heathens, profess'd Adversaries of that Doctrine, of which those Miracles were the Vouchers.

And when these things were wrought, all the Eye-Witnesses that were capable of Conviction, readily own'd the Hand of God in 'em, and could not but confess that the Power by which they were acted was something more than Humane.

When *Moses* wrought his Miracles in the Land of Egypt, *Pharaoh*, to destroy the Credit of 'em, calls for the great Masters of Magick to confront him, and if *Moses* did no more than they, his pretended Commission must pass for a Forgery and Imposture; but the Issue of the Contest was quite contrary to *Pharaoh's* Expectation.

Moses threw down his Rod which turn'd to a Serpent; the Magicians did so too, but with this difference, *Moses's* Rod swallow'd up theirs. *Moses* struck the Waters and they became Blood, and afterwards brought up the Froggs; the Magicians did the same with their Enchantments: But at the fourth Tryal, that of turning the Dust into Lice, the Magicians are nonplust, and could go no farther, but confess plainly, this was the Finger of God, and presently after the Dispute ended.

So

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So that if after this *Pharaoh* persist in his Obstinacy, it must be taken as a Stroke from Heaven, an Infatuation from above, and a direful Prefage of all those heavy Judgments that were to fall on him and his People.

And under the Gospel, when the *Jews* call'd upon our Saviour for a Sign to justify his Commission, and urg'd him to speak out plainly, *whether he was the Messiah or not*, he constantly appeals to the Works that were wrought by him, as the best Credentials of his Authority; and if they were not convinc'd by them, 'twas in vain to go about to convince them any other way.

And tho' the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* started an Objection against his Miracles, as tho' they were done by the Power of Magick, a Calumny as senseless as 'twas full of Malice; it being never to be comprehended, how so Wise and Sagacious a Spirit as the Devil is, should lend a hand to the Subversion of his own Kingdom; yet all the Sincere and unprejudic'd of the *Jewish Nation* were satisfied of his Divine Mission and Character by what they saw. So *Nicodemus, Rabbi*, thou art a Teacher sent from God; For no Man can do the Works that thou doest, except God be with him. And the Blind Man restor'd to Sight herein argued better than the whole *Sanhedrim*: *Why here is a marvelous thing, that ye know not whence he is, and yet*
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he hath opened my Eyes. And again, If this Man were not of God he could do nothing.

But because Miracles strictly so call'd, are not Calculated for every Age, let us pass on to such other Works of Providence which are wonderful indeed, and deserve our Notice, and which, when they happen, will even constrain us to acknowledge the Hand of God in 'em : As when we see in the

Second Place,

The greatest Designs of Worldly Men, who have had no other Ends in view, but to gratifie their own Pride, and advance their own Interest by 'em, at the Expence, and to the Prejudice of vast Numbers of their Fellow-Creatures : when we see these blasted and brought to nothing, notwithstanding they were laid with all the Art and Policy that Humane Wisdom could afford, and backt with all that Strength that Humane Power could furnish, so that the Success of them, as to all outward Appearance, could not possibly fail.

There have been, in all Ages, Men of Large Capacities, and Aspiring Thoughts, who not content with the Station they were in, have form'd mighty Projects to Enlarge their Bounds, and Aggrandize their Families ; and for that purpose, have stuck at nothing that might Accomplish their Ends ; but by Trampling under Foot

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all the Measures of Justice and Equity, by breaking thro' all the Obligations of Solemn Oaths and Publick Treaties, by disturbing the Quiet and Repose of Mankind, and by Sacrificing the Lives, the Fortunes, the Liberties of Millions of Innocent People to their Ambition, have endeavour'd to gain the Point they aim'd at.

And when they have done so, a little time has discover'd the Vanity of all this, and that a Greatness founded upon Oppression and Injustice cannot be lasting: This Goodly Fabrick of Power, rais'd with so much Cost and Industry, like *Nebuchadnezzar's* Image, has been broke and dash'd in Pieces by a Stone cut out of the Mountain; some Accident unforeseen, or not considerable enough to be taken Notice of, has scatter'd it abroad, like Chaff before the Wind; and had it not been for some Records of History, the Names and Actions of those Mighty Men had lain in as much Obscurity as their Bodies, and the Fame of their Glories had expir'd almost with their Breath.

Of all this, the Revolutions that happen'd in the Four Great Monarchies, discover'd by an Angel to the Prophet *Daniel*, are a pregnant Instance; and almost all Nations have afforded Examples of the same Nature.

Now

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Now, when we see such Traverses of Fortune, in the Conduct of Great Men; when we behold the Wonderful Changes that have happen'd in States and Kingdoms, that the deepest Policies have been turn'd into Folly, and the strongest Force has been dispers'd and brought to nothing, we must, if we are not harden'd beyond Conviction, acknowledge that there is one above higher than all the Powers that are in the Earth; *who taketh the Wise in their own Craftiness, and carries headlong the Counsels of the Froward; who scattereth the Proud in the Imagination of their Heart, and taketh down the Mighty from their Seat; who changes the Times and Seasons; in a word, who doeth whatsoever pleaseth him in the Heavens, and the Earth, and none may say unto him, What dost thou?*

3. When we see the Wisest and best Ends for the Good of Mankind brought about by such Means that were very unlikely to accomplish the same, and which in all humane Appearance could not have produc'd such Effects by their own Natural Strength and Force, we must ascribe the Glory of 'em to some Superior Power, and confess with the Psalmist, *These Things hath God done.*

Of this kind the Propagation of the Gospel affords a Remarkable Instance.

'Twas no very likely thing, if we reason from Natural Principles, that Twelve Men, so meanly Qualified as the Apostles were, Men that had neither Eloquence to perswade, nor Force to compel, nor Authority to command, nor any other secular Gifts to recommend 'em to the World, should in so short a time, as during their own Lives, disperse the Christian Faith over so great a Part of the Earth; and that in spite of all the Opposition they met with from *Jews* and *Infidels*; and yet we are assured that by an Assistance from Above, they did conquer all Difficulties, and advanc'd the Work that was put into their Hands to a great Degree of Perfection.

And when that Doctrine had lost much of its Native Purity, by those corrupt Mixtures that grew up with it in after Ages, and such Superstructures were rais'd upon that Foundation, as serv'd to no end but to gratifie the Pride and Luxury of the worst sort of Christians: The Restoration of it to its Primitive Simplicity was a Work so extraordinary in all the Steps of it, that nothing but a Divine Power was able to effect it.

The Sale of Indulgences in *Germany*, which gave Rise to the Reformation abroad, was Scandalous to the last Degree, and rais'd the Indignation of every honest Man against it; and yet no Man at that time could

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could imagine that that Practice was considerable enough to produce such vast Consequences, as shaking off the Papal Tyranny in so great a part of the Empire.

And the matter of the Divorce in the time of K. *Henry* the Eighth, might have been Accommodated with Ease at the Beginning, and yet the Contest grew so high at last, betwixt a haughty Pope and a high-spirited Prince, as to throw off the Supremacy of *Rome* in that Reign, and to pave the way for a more entire Reformation in the next.

So great a Fire does a small Spark often kindle, and such vast Effects do sometimes spring from the most contemptible Causes.

And indeed, the great Designs of Heaven have been generally brought about by the meanest Instruments, that the Glory of 'em might not rest on Second Causes, but rise up to the Original, by grateful Acknowledgments of that Power and Wisdom that were so plainly demonstrated in 'em.

So the Apostle tells us, *That God hath chosen the foolish Things of the World, to confound the Wise, and weak Things to confound the Things that are Mighty; yea and base Things that are despised, and even Things that are not, to bring to nought the Things that are, that no Flesh should Glory in his Presence.*

4. When

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4. When we see the Church of God, in all times, and under all Conditions, stand firm and impregnable, so that neither the open Attacks of her Enemies without, nor the Treacherous Underminings of those within, have been able to shake her Foundations, we must believe that She has some Almighty Guardian to watch over and protect her in all her needs.

The State of the Church has ever been a State of Warfare, and continual Opposition; and the Foes she has to contend with are not weak and despicable, but Mighty and Powerful. *For we wrestle not against Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darknes of this World, against spiritual Wickedness in high Places.* Eph. 6. 12. There is a whole Kingdom of Devils to be oppos'd and conquer'd; a World thick set with charming Plagues, and fatal Delusions to be guarded against: And besides the Dangers that threaten from without, within there are False Brethren, and False Apostles, ever ready to sacrifice Religion to their Interest, and their God to Mammon; there are Hereticks and Schismaticks, Wolves in Sheeps Cloathing, that go about to poyson the Faith, by their unsound Opinions, and to break the Peace and Unity of the Church by causeless Divisions; and that the Ark of God should weather all these Storms, and ride Safe upon
this

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this Tempestuous Sea, what other Reason can be given for it, but that there is a Sovereign Pilot at the Helm, to whom the *Winds and Waves are in Subjection*; who *sitteth above the Floods*; who *stilleth the Raging of the Sea*, and the *Madness of the People*, and turneth every threatening Gust into Silence and a Calm. And besides those Tryals that are constant and ordinary, there have been others of a higher Nature, and more dangerous Complexions.

There have been fiery Tryals, and bloody Persecutions, set on foot in several Ages for the utter Extirpation of the Church of God; the Kings of the Earth have stood up in Confederacy, and the Rulers have taken Counsel together, saying, Let us break their Bonds asunder, and cast away their Cords from us: Let us swallow 'em up quick as the Grave, and tread them under that they rise up no more: Let us root up this sanctified Profession that pretend to give Laws to Mankind, and to curtail the Liberties of Humane Nature. And yet he that sitteth in the Heavens hath laugh'd 'em to Scorn; the Lord hath had 'em in Derision; he hath set his Son upon the Holy Hill of *Sion*, and hath given him a Kingdom Higher than all the Powers upon Earth; a Kingdom that has out-liv'd all those that have risen up against it; and which

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which will continue till all his Enemies are put under his Feet.

He hath built his Church upon a Rock, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against her ; tho' she pass thro' the Fire, it shall not consume her, and thro' the Floods, yet they shall not overwhelm her ; under every Oppression she gathers Strength ; in every Affliction she thrives and prospers, and will at last Triumph over all Opposition.

Lastly,

When we see the Authors of some great Wickedness fall under the severest Judgments, and that in so remarkable a Manner, that very often the Crime is painted to the Life in the Punishment inflicted upon it : When we see great Sinners intangled in their own Nets, overthrown in the Pits they dug for others, and sinking under their own Mischievous Inventions, we should be more stupid than the Beasts that perish, if we did not observe the Providence of God in all this, and were not mov'd by it to adore the Justice and Equity of the Divine Proceedings.

All Histories abound with Examples of this kind, and the Sacred Writings have Recorded the most Memorable.

Thus the Old World was sunk in a Deluge of Impieties, and that prepar'd it for a Flood of Waters.

When

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When *Pharaoh's* Obstinacy had made him ripe for Destruction, that Element in which he purpos'd to overthrow his Enemies, becomes a Sanctuary to them, and a Grave to him and all his Host.

The Filthy *Sodomites* were first scorch'd with Flames of Lust, and those brought down Flames from above to consume 'em.

When *Nebuchadnezzar's* Pride had o'erwhelm'd his Reason, and he ascrib'd all his Glories to his own Wisdom and Power, God gave him the Heart of a Beast, and his Dwelling was with the Cattle, till his Understanding return'd to him, till he own'd a Subjection to the God of Heaven, whose Kingdom is an Everlasting Kingdom, and whose Dominion endureth thro' all Generations; and then his former Brightness and Grandeur return'd with his Senses.

And when *Haman* plotted the Destruction of the Church, the wicked Contrivance turn'd to his own; and the Gallows erected for his Adversary becomes the fatal Theatre of his own Destiny.

And to add one other Instance under the Gospel, the *Jews* Crucified our Saviour upon a politick Consideration, as they pretended, least the *Romans* should come and take both their Place and Nation; and the Method they took for their Safety,
C prov'd

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prov'd their Destruction; for that very Generation saw those Romans they guarded against with so much Caution, taking Possession of their City and Temple, destroying all the Remainder of their Power, and scattering their Tribes over the Face of the whole Earth.

These, with many others, are sufficient to convince us, *That the Lord is in his Holy Temple; that he hath prepar'd his Seat for Judgment; that his Eyes consider the Poor, and his Eyelids try the Children of Men; that he alloweth the Righteous, but the Ungodly, and him that delighteth in Wickedness, doth his Soul abhor. Upon the Wicked he will rain Snares, Fire and Brimstone, Storms and Tempests; this shall be the Portion of their Cup; for the Righteous Lord loveth Righteousness, his Countenance will behold the Just.*

Let us now call home our Thoughts to the occasion of this Day, and we shall find most of the foregoing Considerations Exemplified, in the wonderful Deliverance of this Church and Nation.

When the Enemies of our Happy Constitution had, by a long Train of Successful Impieties, rais'd themselves to that Height of Power their Ambition made them hope for; when they had broke in Pieces the best Monarchy, and the best Reform'd Church in the World, to build upon the Ruines of them, their beloved Schemes of
Pres-

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Presbytery, and a Common-wealth; they doubted not but that they should be able to keep up this new Form of Government for their own time, and derive it entire to Posterity.

And were we to Judge of Things by the Rules of Worldly Wisdom, their Hopes were not altogether groundless.

They had Conquer'd every thing that could give a Check to their Designs; they had reduc'd all the Friends of the Ancient Government to the lowest Ebb; they had scatter'd the Revenues of the Church and Crown amongst those that were firmest to their Interest; they had fenc'd their new Power with the strongest Laws they could make, and bound it on the Subjects with the strictest Sanctions; the Strength and Riches of the Nation were in their Hands, and there were Fleets and Armies flush'd with Victory and Triumph at their Command: In a word, their Power was Formidable at Home, and their Friendship abroad was coveted by all their Neighbouring States; nor did they want able Instruments to manage all these Things to the best Advantage; the Consequence of all which seem'd to be a Firm and Lasting Establishment.

And yet this Mighty Fabrick, so strongly knit and compacted in all Appearance, was

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really Weak and Tottering, considering the Foundation on which it stood.

And it could not hold, since it was built on a Complication of the blackest Crimes that perhaps were ever acted by any People under the Light of the Gospel; on Rebellion and Perjury, on Sacrilege and Injustice, upon the Blood of Thousands of Innocent Subjects, and the Royal Blood of a Great and a Good Prince; on a false Zeal and dissembled Godliness. On Horrid Blasphemy, and an open Contempt of the Divine Majesty; for Heaven was Invok'd by Fasts and Humiliations, to abett and countenance all this Wickedness; and every Success in Mischief was entituled to the Providence of God, and the grossest Impieties were varnish'd over with the Cause of God and Religion.

And should not the Judge of all the Earth visit for these things; should not his Soul be Aveng'd on such a Sinful Generation? Was his Ear deaf, that he could not hear the Groans of an Afflicted Church? or was his Arm shortned that he could not deliver an enslav'd People? no sure.

For when our Oppressors had fill'd up the Measure of their Sins, and when all Humane Attempts to shake off the Yoke they had impos'd on us became ineffectual, and every Struggle the Royal Interest made for its own Deliverance sunk it yet lower, and

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our very Hopes were expiring with our Constitution; then it was God's time to exert his Power; and he did it in such a wonderful manner, that all Wise Men that saw it then did say, and all that consider it now, must say, *This hath God done.*

He rais'd up a Deliverer unequal indeed by his own Abilities, but by Divine Assistance sufficiently qualified for the Work he was call'd to; he inspir'd him with Conduct and Resolution, carried him thro' a thousand Difficulties, till he had brought this Great, this Glorious Work to Perfection.

And that same Illegal and Arbitrary Power, which had been well-nigh Twenty Years in raising, and that in such a Bloody and Barbarous manner, that the Nation blush'd for the Cruelty of its New Masters, was overturn'd in an Instant, and that without one Blow struck, or one Drop of Blood shed.

This was the Lord's doing, and it is, it must be for ever Marvelous in our Eyes.

And now what Return shall we make to the good Providence of God, for all the Blessings deriv'd to us on this Day, for the Restoration of our exil'd Princes to their Just Rights; for the Re-establishment of our Church upon its old Basis; for the Recovery of our Laws and Liberties out of the Hands of Usurpation and Tyranny, but our
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most Solemn and Thankful Acknowledgments for 'em, joyn'd with a firm Resolution, by the Grace of God, to walk Worthy of these great Mercies for the future, and a hearty Zeal, by all Lawful and Justifiable Means, to entail 'em on our Posterity to the World's end.

And since the State is not likely to enjoy a perfect Calm and Tranquility, when the Church within it is broke and shatter'd by Intestine Differences; but as the one declines in Health, the other must sink in Proportion.

And since we have found the Truth of this Observation by a very costly Experiment, and that the Destruction of this Monarchy was a necessary Consequent of the Ruin of this Church; and as they were inseparable in their Fall, they could not be restor'd but in Consummation.

Let me exhort you all in the Bowels of Jesus Christ, to stand firm and inflexible in this part of our Constitution, and not be lead away by any subtle Insinuations to abandon that Church which our Pious Reformers thought worthy the last Drop of their Blood, which our best Princes ever since have guarded by their Authority, and all our Parliaments have fenc'd by the strongest Laws they could devise.

Whatever Schemes may be form'd by the Ablest Statesman for the Secutity of the
Civil

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Civil Government, if the Honour of God, and the Care of his Church establisht amongst us, be left out of the Design, we may venture to say, without the Spirit of Prophecy, that all such Projects will fail in the end, and become Abortive; since God has declar'd so expressly, that they who Honour him shall be Honoured by him, and they who despise him shall be lightly regarded.

Let us therefore be advis'd to take up a stedfast, hearty and pious Resolution by the Grace of God to preserve the Peace and Unity of this Church, which he has so wonderfully own'd as this Day inviolable to our Lives end.

And that as the most certain infallible Means to secure to us all those other Temporal Blessings, he was pleas'd to restore to us, together with our Religious Interests.

And may the Father of Mercies look down with Pity and Compassion upon the distracted State of these Kingdoms, and open all our Eyes to behold the Things that belong to our Peace, before it be too late, and that for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ.

To whom with the Holy Ghost, be all Honour, Glory and Dominion, henceforth and for ever.

F I N I S.

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Prophecy, that all such Projects will fail in
the end, and become Abominable; and that
had it not been expressly, that they who do
not think that he is Honoured by him, and
they who despise him shall be lighted
guided.

Let us therefore be careful to follow a
just, hearty and pure Religion, by
the Grace of God to preserve the Peace and
Unity of this Church, which he has so
wonderfully owned as this Day in which
to our Lives end.

And thus as the mass contain
seems to flow to us all, that our
total Blessings, he would be so good to
us together with our religious

And may the Father of Mercies look
down with pity and Compassion upon
distressed State of this Kingdom, and o
pen all our Eyes to behold the Things that
belong to our Peace, before it be too late
and that for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ

To whom we say Amen. 63 Y 22

